

# Imagining a World Without Belief



## What If There Was No God?

Before we even begin to look at the evidence and the arguments for the presence of God, we need to take a minute to look at the reason why we would even desire God in our lives to begin with. The first and foremost reason to believe is perhaps the simplest. Believe because it is TRUE. We are going to demonstrate that as we look at the arguments for God's existence. But at this early juncture, let's just see how our world has been affected by a belief in God, because it truly has been profoundly shaped by theism, the belief in God! Our world is filled with millions and millions of believers. But even some of these, some of us who have believed in God since our earliest years, often have had a doubt or a question that has shaken our faith. Is it OK to imagine a world without God? Is it OK to struggle with the deepest questions of faith and reason. If we doubt, are we less Godly? If we don't, are we less intellectual? Let's begin by looking at an ancient writing that Christians examine closely to see how God feels about our doubts. Does our doubt prove that there is no God? Let's see:



### Romans 3:3-4

*What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: 'So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.'*

From the Christian perspective, even if you are in the midst of complete denial, God continues to exist and sustain the universe. God is truth, and He is patient and faithful enough to wait out your doubts.



## Imagine the World Without God

Now I want you to close your eyes and pretend with me. Imagine that no one has EVER even thought about God. Imagine that no one has ever had any faith at all. Imagine that no one has ever trusted that God would come to their rescue, that God would provide a place for them in eternity, that God was watching their every move and loving them as His own. What would that world look like? Would it be any different than the world we are living in today. I think it would! If you are willing to jettison the notion of a God, then you had better be ready to jettison a few other ideas as well. First, if there is no God, there can be no ORDER. Now think about it for a second. Just think about it from a purely practical perspective. Our world is ordered to a greater or lesser degree. Each culture sets up rules for its own behavior, and these rules are principally derived from its thinking about the nature of God.



## Christian Influences in Our World

This has also been true for the United States in particular. Even today, we are supported and girded by millions of Christians and Theists who believe in the existence of God and gladly choose to respond to His existence in joy and obedience. No country in the world can match the United States for volunteerism and altruism. The number of volunteer groups, service groups, aid groups and non profit agencies in the United States can be matched by no other country on the planet. Every day, people in these voluntary organizations work to feed the poor, house the homeless, teach the young,

rehabilitate the broken, assist the aging, and counsel the lost. You probably take much, if not all, of this for granted. But if these faith based groups were removed from our society, what would remain? If believing Christians were removed from our country, what would it look like? Some would say it would look a lot better, and they base this statement on a bad experience they may have had with a Christian in the past, (as if one bad experience with a car could ever remove their faith in automobile transportation!)



### **The Faith of the Fathers**

But the reality is that our society exists in the shadow of its God fearing founders and on the foundation of an unshakable belief in God. Even those who would deny God in our country are only afforded the opportunity for this denial because they live in a place where Christians originally reached out in love and tolerance:

#### **1 Patrick Henry**

*'It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here.'*

#### **2 Charles Carroll signer of the Declaration of Independence**

*'Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime and pure (and) which insures to the good eternal happiness, are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments.'*

#### **3 John Adams**

*The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were. . . the general principles of Christianity. . . I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God; and that those principles of liberty are as unalterable as human nature. Twenty times in the course of my late reading have I been on the point of breaking out, 'This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion at all!!!' But in this exclamation I would have been as fanatical as Bryant or Cleverly. Without religion, this world would be something not fit to be mentioned in polite company, I mean hell.*

#### **4 Samuel Adams a signer of the Declaration of Independence**

*The right to freedom being the gift of the Almighty...The rights of the colonists as Christians...may be best understood by reading and carefully studying the institutions of The Great Law Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament.*

#### **5 Alexander Hamilton signed the Constitution, and became the first Secretary of the Treasury**

*In my opinion, the present constitution is the standard to which we are to cling. Under*

*its banner bona fide must we combat our political foes, rejecting all changes but through the channel itself provided for amendments. By these general views of the subject have my reflections been guided. I now offer you the outline of the plan they have suggested. Let an association be formed to be denominated 'The Christian Constitutional Society,' its object to be first: The support of the Christian religion. second: The support of the United States.*



**John Jay**

**co-author of the Federalist Papers, first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court**

*I have long been of opinion that the evidence of the truth of Christianity requires only to be carefully examined to produce conviction in candid minds...*

Our entire culture here in the United States was founded on a belief in God, and while we may do our best to move away from this reality, our laws, our culture, our traditions and our heart as a nation is still operating within the faint memory of our distant faith. This faith continues to hold us together. It gives us order, peace and strength.



### **Atheism Leads to Another Place**

And while Christianity has been blamed for much intolerance, death and destruction, primarily in the history of the ancient Crusades, atheism has shown itself to be a far greater source of disorder, chaos and death. Just look at the history of two regions and the effect that institutionalized atheistic communism has had. In the history of communist China, where atheism was venerated and institutionalized, 35 million people have died at the hands of dictators while a populace watched silently. In Communist Russia, another bastion of atheism, 61 million people have been murdered in a similar fashion. Regardless of what you may think about faith and Christianity, it doesn't even begin to compare with the realities and atrocities of those cultures and nations that have denied the existence of God. Now some would say that any Christian comparison between Christianity and Atheism, particularly as it relates to the presence of evil, is merely an attempt to distance ourselves from our own responsibility as Christians for the wrongs that believers have committed, or even continue to commit. But that is not actually true. As Christians, it is our responsibility to recognize that all men are terribly fallen, believers and non-believers alike. Christians are not 'off the hook' for their behavior. But history does demonstrate that men, when completely unrestrained by a faith system that would hold them accountable to God, are actually more inclined to do whatever their heart desires without regard for others. Should it really surprise us that people without any faith in a holy God often behave worse than those who do believe that they must someday give account? Can there really be any argument here?



### **The Source of Order**

As a Christian, I believe that God is the source of all possible order in our world, and I believe that order is part of his nature. After all, the laws of nature are simply the laws of God. And God's call on all believers is to live a life that reflects his orderly nature. It just so happens that Christian Scripture reflects this truth:



**1 Corinthians 14:33**

*For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*



## **2 Timothy 1:6-7**

*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

Even those of us who have refused to believe in a God, still find ourselves living within the memory and shadow of his truth in our lives, whether we like it or not:



## **Romans 2:13-16**

*The Gentiles do not have the Law; but whenever they do by instinct what the Law commands, they are their own law, even though they do not have the Law. Their conduct shows that what the Law commands is written in their hearts. Their consciences also show that this is true, since their thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them.*



## **God is the Source of Hope**

There is something else that faith provides. It provides hope. Think about this. Without a belief in God, what can one truly hope for? How many times do you need to be let down by people before you accept the reality that people to object of our hope? And while we certainly hope for a number of things that may happen in the course of our life time, the ultimate hope that exists at the core of every heart on the planet is the hope of eternity; the hope that we will live beyond this life. If you ask people what will happen to them when they die, the overwhelming majority will begin to express ideas about an afterlife, and this life looks and sounds a lot like heaven. You see, many of us have lived a life of hope, and this life has been marked by courage and joy that we would otherwise not have! On the flipside, there are so many people who live in fear of dying. This life seems to be all that there is, and they cling to every second as if it were their last.



## **Afraid to Die**

Now let's step out of the box for a minute. There is a young man in our ministry that is a hemophiliac. Imagine this young man in a world without God. He has this rare blood disease that causes him to bleed so freely at the slightest injury, and as a result, he is always in jeopardy of bleeding to death. Can you imagine what his life would be like? There are several activities that hemophiliacs should probably avoid. Probably shouldn't juggle knives, for example. Might want to think twice before you begin a career in boxing. But there are also some very simple, common activities that are far more dangerous than you might imagine. After all, if you cut yourself while trimming your nails or shaving, there is a real possibility of serious injury. And simple items like a piece of paper present real dangers to people with this disorder. Papers cuts are as bad as shark bites! If this life is all there is, then a hemophiliac has a lot to fear and a lot to be cautious about. And if you think about it, those of us who are not hemophiliacs really aren't that much different! If there is no God, there is no hope for a life beyond this one, and if that is true, we better be very careful to hang on to every minute. That's really no way to live. If we are going to guard this fragile life without a hope of a future in heaven, we will become more and more cautious, more and more fearful, more and more imprisoned by the limits of a single lifetime. That's just the reality of a world without God. But I have known people who have lived very courageously. I've known people who accepted remarkable challenges without fear. They were people of hope and people of faith.



### The Good and the Bad of It

See, hope has given these people a belief that they have no need to fear because God is their protection and the provider of an eternal life of incredible joy that begins the minute we close our eyes at death. If you knew that to be true, how would your life be different? It is this kind of hope and courage that has empowered people like Mother Teresa. She believed that no risk was too great, because God was in charge of her life and if worse came to worse, heaven always awaits. Now there is a downside to this kind of faith based hope, that's for sure. All the terrorists on 9/11/2001 also had a dying hope in an afterlife that gave them amazing courage, albeit evil in nature. See, I'm not saying that hope in an afterlife is always positive, but this kind of hope HAS been a sustaining factor in the lives of people all over the planet. But it is true that WHAT God you place this hope in, is every bit as important as the hope itself.



#### John 17:3-4

*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*



#### Psalms 71:5

*For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth.*



### The Testimony of Our Own Life Experience

Now the role of hope is something that we also take for granted, but most of us have heard powerful stories of people who held onto their hope in difficult times or were incredibly courageous. Can you think of one? We're often impressed with the stories and testimonies of people who have been hopeful and courageous, but no testimony is as important as the Testimony of God. If there is a God, He too probably has a story to tell. As a Christian, I believe that he HAS told that story, and He wants us to hear it:



#### 1 John 5:9-14

*We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*



### A Personal Caring God

See, hope is multi-faceted, and includes a hope of heaven. But more than that, a belief in God provides us with a hope that he actually cares about us today! Those who believe in a personal God come to KNOW that they have a hope for a future, and they KNOW that God is also involved in the present. This knowledge makes a difference in their everyday lives.





### **Psalm 95:3-7**

*For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

Those who believe in God, know that God cares about them, and the direct result of this knowledge is an overwhelming sense of gratitude. And without God, an important aspect of our lives is woefully deficient.



### **God is the Object of Gratitude**

If there is no God, if no one believed that He exists, could there ever truly be a sense of gratitude in our world? Gratitude is the closest sibling of joy, peace and contentedness, and those who are able to develop and harness a grateful heart find happiness in ways that the rest of us only envy. Think about the Thank You notes and cards that you have sent over the years. In every expression of thanks, two words (“Thank You”) are used to express the idea. The verb “Thank” is used in conjunction with an object, “You”. Do you realize that without an object of thanks, there can be NO thankfulness? Every time we say, “Thank You” we are directing it at someone. And there is a direct relationship between the level of joy we experience and the object of our thanks.



### **The More Eternal the Object of Thanks, the More Eternal the Joy**

Think about it. You know instinctively that it is true. Do you remember when you were small and received all those gifts at Christmas time? You were so happy! And your happiness spilled out to the giver of the gift in the form of thankfulness. These special holidays were filled with gifts and with thanksgiving. But people of faith understand gratitude in a much more profound way. They come to believe that every day is filled with the gift of life and many other blessings, and they understand that these blessings come from someone. They come from an eternal God who is the source of all good things and the object of every “thank you”. Faith moves you from occasional gratefulness toward someone who has given you a temporal gift, toward a heart of gratitude for the giver of all good things. Gratitude in this sense is not a moment in time, but rather a life long journey. There are people who live like this, and they are having a profound impact on our world. If they were all removed, along with their heart of gratitude, what would our world look like? Interestingly, Christian scripture encourages this kind of gratitude:



### **Colossians 3:16-17**

*“...sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*



### **God is the Source of All Purpose**

Of all the things that a belief in God provides us as a people and as a nation, perhaps the most important is the provision of divine purpose. If there is no

God, what is the purpose of our existence? There are two questions that we struggle with as humans. They are the same two questions that people have asked for thousands of years:

*How did we get here?*

*Why are we here?*

Of these two questions, perhaps the second is the most important as it applies to our everyday lives. Millions of believers across the globe live each day intentionally with conviction and determination because they believe that they are here for a reason. They believe they were designed by God for a purpose.



### **The Sustaining Force in Difficult Times**

Purpose is the force that holds us up in difficult times. If we are convinced that we are here for a reason, and our faith leads us to discover and understand what that purpose is, then difficult times are easier to endure. Without a sense of divine purpose for our lives, each day becomes a self contained experience without connection to the next. We have no sense of mission, destiny or plan. A world like that would simply strive to enjoy the moment, serve the individual, and neglect any future vision altogether. Yet we are not this way as a people. We DO care about the future and we DO care about our impact as a nation and as a people. Why? Because so many of us believe there is a God, and that He has a plan for our lives. We believe we have a purpose:



#### **Jeremiah 29:11-13**

*"I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

If believers were removed from our world, if it could be demonstrated once and forever that there was no God, then this sense of destiny and purpose would also vanish entirely. And the world would certainly be a very different place. Most of us do believe that we are here for a reason. You probably believe it, even though you might deny the existence of God. So, ask yourself, if there is no God, where does that sense of purpose come from?



### **But Is It True?**

All this preliminary talk about faith and the impact that it has on our world does NOT, in and of itself, prove that there is a God. While it may be true that faith has benefits for a culture, that is no reason to believe. First and foremost, we should believe because it is TRUE. And that is what we intend to investigate and test. It is God's desire that we should test every source and notion of truth:



#### **1 Thessalonians 5:21**

*Test everything. Hold on to the good.*



### **They Were Not Liars, They Were Not Fools**

The first believers were not naïve, gullible fools. They were doubters and testers and investigators. The original apostles struggled to understand the

nature of God, but they believed that they had a distinct advantage over us who believe today. They had God standing right in front of them:



### **2 Peter 1:16-17**

*We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*



### **1 John 1:1-2**

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.*



### **Our Mind and Your Heart**

As we investigate the evidences and examine the arguments, we need to remember that God has no desire for us to base our faith on an emotional response. But he is confident that once our minds bring us to the point of rational belief, we will also experience an emotional outpouring in response to what we know to be true. Once we “get it” we will be overwhelmed with the magnitude of what we just “got”. So, use your mind, but be ready to surrender your heart.